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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KWMN](#) [KISL](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: KUWAITI MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD ESTABLISHES WOMEN'S  
POLITICAL BRANCH

REF: A. 06 KUWAIT 1638  
[1](#)B. 06 KUWAIT 1637

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary and Comment: The Islamic Constitutional Movement (the political wing of Kuwait's Muslim Brotherhood) officially launched a women's office in early May with the goal of enhancing its outreach to women voters. Though the KMB's social wing has a history of successful women's programming, the appearance of women as voters has required a change in approach. The leaders of the ICM's women's office will focus on training, electoral outreach, media, and public relations. They enjoy a well-developed social network that will help them in mobilizing support.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Comment: The battle for women's votes has begun to intensify across the political spectrum. Liberals have organized more intensively recently, with major lobbying efforts on two main issues: a proposed law on women's civil and social entitlements; and a quota to ensure that women are elected to parliament. The liberals seem most focused on the issue of getting women into political office. Some liberal women have initiated, with MEPI assistance, a center to train female political candidates. The quota, which may require a constitutional amendment, is more controversial. The ICM's women's office has focused instead on supporting the women's entitlements law, which would give women additional opportunities for extended paid leaves of absence from work. The passage of such a law would redound to the ICM's political benefit, whereas the liberals' opposition to the bill on the grounds that women should work more to increase their involvement in public life will be a harder sell to the Kuwaiti public. The ICM women's group has adopted what may be a politically shrewd strategy of focusing on bread-and-butter issues while leaving the liberals to focus on larger political ideals that may not resonate as strongly with Kuwaiti voters. End Summary and Comment.

ICM Women's Office to Improve MB Political Outreach  
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[1](#)3. (C/NF) The Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) -- the political wing of Kuwait's Muslim Brotherhood (KMB) -- announced in early May that it had established a new office for women's affairs. Wafa' Al-Ansari, a 35-year-old lawyer, heads the committee and told PolOff on May 19 that the new office hopes to improve the ICM's efforts to attract women voters. The Social Reform Society (the Brotherhood's social wing) has long had an active women's committee, which helped in the 2006 elections, and Al-Ansari said that the ICM had already been doing a great deal of women's outreach. However, the new office seeks to gather the ICM's ad hoc efforts on women's issues under a more coherent administrative structure. Al-Ansari emphasized that a key

message of her group would be the ICM's openness and desire to cooperate with other political groupings to effect reform.

She confidently asserted that the ICM enjoys the most grassroots support of any political organization among Kuwaiti women.

14. (C/NF) The women's office has committees devoted to media relations, public relations (which consists primarily of reaching out to other political and social groups), training and awareness, and electoral districts. The heads of each of these committees attended the May 19 meeting and explained their strategies to PolOff. Notable projects include devising district-specific election campaign strategies and training women in political activism. (Note: MEPI is in the initial phases of providing funding to a liberal women's group to set up a training institute for female political activists. End Note.) The electoral districts committee chair appeared to be in her fifties, but all the other committee heads appeared to be in their late twenties or early thirties. They mentioned their older male relatives' history in the KMB and cited their experience in university politics. While they will bring youthful enthusiasm, they clearly constitute a less-experienced team than the leaders of the women's branch of the Social Reform Society. Al-Ansari explained this by saying many of the older women involved in the KMB felt uncomfortable with the public role that involvement in politics would demand.

#### ICM Supports Women's Civil and Social Rights Law

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15. (C/NF) The ICM women's office has already begun its work by distributing materials in support of a proposed new women's civil and social rights law. ICM MP Duaij

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Al-Shammari introduced the law in Parliament. It includes long, generous paid leave to women for taking care of children and sick relatives and addresses areas that disadvantage women under Kuwaiti law, such as the denial of benefits to unmarried women and Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti men. Liberal women activists vehemently oppose the law because they say it incentivizes women to stay home rather than continue working after they get married and have children. They have been holding seminars and using the press to argue against the law and succeeded in pressuring to have it withdrawn for further study. The Islamists, along with other allies, notably Shi'a MP Salah Ashour, have quietly managed to get the law back on parliament's agenda for its next session on May 28.

#### ICM Women Still Undecided on Quotas and Female Candidates

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16. (C/NF) Al-Ansari said the women's office has not come up with a position on a parliamentary women's quota, an issue that has been pushed recently by several leading liberal women activists. The quota issue presents a problem for the ICM. The ICM declared in 2005 that it supported women's right to vote but opposed their serving in the parliament, and therefore voted against the whole women's political rights bill. Naturally, a quota would not seem to fit their agenda. However, the 2005 vote also constituted a defeat for the old guard in the ICM. It brought in a new generation of leaders who view women's participation more positively and who had argued the ICM should support the entire political rights bill. ICM Secretary General Bader Al-Nashi has told PolOffs that he favors nominating women, though he has not decided when the ICM should do so. Al-Ansari argued that events have left those who argued against women's political rights behind, and that politicians had to either retire or adjust to the new reality. However, she toed the party line and said that the ICM still does not have an official position on whether it intends to field women candidates.

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